led to pesticide resistance in pests in crops and polluting soils and environment.

(iii) Soil/Seed/Fertilizer testing infrastructure would be strengthened further so as to keep the cost of cultivation within manageable limits.

(iv) Cutting down the cost of cultivation through improving the efficiency of agricultural machinery.

(v) Development of cost-effective appropriate post-harvest technological packages for handling farm produce, providing facilities for marketing, grading, precooling, storage and refrigerated transportation of fruits and vegetables to distant markets.

(vi) Strengthening of location specific research in various regions of Punjab State.

(vii) Emphasis on land reclamation programme and dry-land farming in the arid/sub-mountain zone.

Conservation of Shrimp in Andhra Pradesh

1681. SHRI K.M. SAIFULLAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether deep-sea prawn trawlers and mechanised boat operators are at loggerheads on the issue of conservation of shrimp; and

(b) the steps taken to hammer out a solution to free the fishing harbour in Andhra Pradesh out of tension?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) The dispute between Mechanised Fishing Boat Operators Association and Trawler Operators Association in Andhra Pradesh regarding observance of no fishing season during April to June 98 for conservation of shrimp and fish has been resolved in a meeting held by the District Collector, Vishakhapatnam on 18.4.1998 which was attended by the concerned Fishing Associations.

Production and demand of milk and milk products

1682. SHRI K. M. SAIFULLAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the total production and demand of milk and milk products in the country;

(b) the estimated requirement of milk and milk products during the next two years;

(c) whether Government propose to formulate any comprehensive plan for increasing milk production; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the action being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) As per provisional estimates, the total production of milk in the country during 1997-98 is about 70.8 million tonnes, of which about 55% is converted into various milk products. The requirement of milk (including in the form of milk products) as per the recommended nutritional norms prescribed by the Indian Council of Medical Research, for the next two years is as under:

	(Million Tonnes)
1998-99	77.7
1999-2000	79.0

(c) and (d) Animal husbandry is a State subject. However, to supplement the efforts of the States for increasing the milk production, a number of Central/ Centrally sponsored schemes are being implemented by the Government of India. Some of the important schemes are as follows:

(i) Extension of Frozen Semen Technology and Progen y Testing Programme.

(ii) National Bull Production Programme.

(iii) Assistance to States for Feed and Fodder Development.

(iv) National Project on Rinderpest Eradication.

(v) Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases.

(vi) Integrated Dairy Development Projects in Non Operation Flood, Hilly and Backward Areas.

Finance and Insurance cover to cotton growers

1683. DR. MOHAN BABU:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that but for the absence of proper financing and insurance cover to cotton growers, a large number of farmers whose cotton crops failed this year had committed suicides under pressure of debts; if so, the details thereof;

(b) what system of financing and providing insurance to farmers existed in these regions; and

(c) what steps have been or are being taken to provide adequate financing and crop insurance facilities to these farmers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) to (c) Recent occurrences in Andhra Pradesh and other States leading to farmers committing suicides on account of financial distress have been noted with great concern by the Central Government. A Study Group has been constituted to examine in depth the nature and extent of indebtedness among the farmers in the State of Andhra Pradesh and to suggest measures for increasing the role of public financial institutions in the purveyal of credit. The Group has visited the State and interacted with the State Government and related agencies and is in the process of finalising its report.

To provide agricultural credit to the farmers, in the country there is a network of rural financial institutions—Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative Credit Structure. Agricultural production loans disbursed through agencies in the year 1996-97 and 1997-98 were Rs. 28,653 crores and Rs. 34,274 crores (anticipated) respectively.

Besides, a Comprehensive Crop Insurance Scheme (CCIS) is in operation in the country since 1985. It covers all farmers growing wheat, paddy, millets (including maize), pulses and oilseeds crops and availing crop loan from Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative credit Institutions. The sum insured is 100% of the scale of finance subject to maximum of Rs. 10,000/- per farmer. Insurance charges are 2% (for wheat, paddy and millets) and 1% (for oilseeds and pulses crops) of the sum insured. The scheme is voluntary in nature and at present 15 States and 2 Union Territories are participating in the scheme.

The following measures have been or are being taken to provide increased flow of credit to the agricultural sector:—

(i) The Commercial Banks have been asked to increase the flow of credit to agriculture.

(ii) To strengthen the financial capability of NABARD, its capital base has been raised.

(iii) Weak Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) have been recapitalised.

(iv) Banks have been advised to set up specialised agricultural branches to deal with high-tech agricultural advances.

(v) Banks have been advised to extend cash credit facilities for meeting composite credit requirements of farmers.

(vi) A proposal for revamping of cooperative credit structure has been initiated.